

## Governance As A Key Factor For Sustainable Cruise Tourism

Riska Nanda<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [riska.nanda@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:riska.nanda@mail.ugm.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

The alignment between cruise tourism practices and sustainability principles remains a continuously debated issue in academic discourse, as it is often perceived as merely offering luxury while generating negative environmental and social impacts

This study aims to examine the urgency of sustainability in the cruise tourism industry through the perspective of destination governance.

The method employed is a literature study by reviewing various relevant scientific sources related to cruise tourism and sustainable governance.

The findings indicate that the sustainability of cruise tourism activities is strongly influenced by the capacity of destination governance to regulate tourist flows, distribute economic benefits, and control environmental impacts.

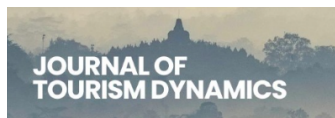
**Conclusion:** This study concludes that sustainable governance is required, demanding a proactive, collaborative, and adaptive approach, supported by a clear regulatory framework and balanced coordination mechanisms, in order for cruise tourism to develop responsibly and equitably in the long term.

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### INTRODUCTION

Cruise tourism has become a rapidly growing trend in the global tourism industry. According to the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA, 2024), global cruise ship capacity is projected to increase by at least 10% between 2024 and 2028, indicating strong demand for this segment. In addition, cruise tourism is considered resilient, as it has demonstrated a faster recovery compared to other types of travel and tourism after the COVID-19 pandemic. This is reflected in the increase in passenger numbers reaching 107%, or 31.7 million, compared to 2019 (CLIA, 2024). As a form of special interest tourism, cruise tourism is also regarded as a strategic sector for increasing foreign exchange earnings and added value, as it targets international tourists with high spending levels (Teguh, 2019). In response to this opportunity, the Indonesian government has established 12 ports of call for embarkation and debarkation of foreign cruise ships through the Regulation of the Minister of Transportation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2023 concerning amendments to Regulation Number 4 of 2022 on services for foreign yachts and cruise ships.



In practice, cruise tourism activities have been implemented in Indonesia, one of which is in Sabang Port, Aceh Province. Although the number of visits fluctuates, Sabang remains a port of call with a docking duration of 8 to 12 hours (Port Report BPKS, 2025). Cruise ship visits to Sabang have significantly contributed to the number of international tourist arrivals, which is an important indicator of tourism growth. For instance, in 2023, the total number of international tourist arrivals reached 8,240 (Disparkot Sabang, 2024), of which 6,188 were cruise tourists (Port Report BPKS, 2024). This means that cruise tourism contributed 72.15% of total international tourist arrivals in Sabang, derived from only eight cruise ship visits within a year.

However, the high percentage of tourist arrivals is often assumed to correlate with increased economic benefits. In reality, previous studies indicate that the economic opportunities generated by cruise tourism in Sabang tend to lead to leakage and opportunity loss. Local communities only receive around 10% of total tourist spending during shore excursions (Nanda et al., 2019). This finding is consistent with Klein (2011), who highlighted that one of the major issues in cruise tourism is the unequal distribution of economic benefits. Similarly, Brida and Zapata (2010) argue that the economic benefits of cruise tourism are often disproportionate to its social and ecological costs, particularly in small destinations. Such conditions contradict the principles of sustainability that underpin contemporary tourism development. Aguirre (2010) further emphasizes that cruise tourism differs from other tourism sub-sectors, as it is often viewed as a neoliberal industry that prioritizes luxury while generating negative environmental and social impacts. Pigram (1990) also notes that achieving sustainability is a significant challenge without practical policy solutions capable of transforming ideas into implementable actions.

Efforts to promote sustainable tourism in destinations require collective commitment from national and regional governments, international institutions, tourism businesses, stakeholders, and tourists. This commitment can be realized through effective governance, which encompasses a framework of rules, norms, and procedures designed to regulate the behavior of various actors. Nanda et al. (2019) argue that economic leakage in cruise tourism destinations is partly due to the limited role of stakeholders, particularly local communities, in governance processes. In line with this, Boluk et al. (2019) propose a conceptual framework to critically examine the role of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in shaping a more sustainable, just, and equitable cruise tourism industry, emphasizing governance and destination planning as key themes. Nkhata and McCool (2012) also highlight the need for new approaches that integrate the inputs and interests of destination managers, stakeholders, industry actors, and government institutions across multiple levels and locations.

Governance itself can be understood as the act or process of steering and regulating (Hall, 2011). More broadly, it refers to decision-making processes, regulatory mechanisms, and coordination among actors in managing a system. Unlike management, which focuses on operational aspects, tourism governance is concerned with the distribution of authority, the roles of actors, and strategic decision-making mechanisms within destinations (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2007). Brida and Zapata (2010) emphasize the importance of having sustainable, data-driven planning and policy frameworks to manage cruise tourism activities effectively. Strengthening local empirical knowledge and community involvement is also crucial, as community empowerment, environmental impact control, communication, and innovation are positively correlated with the sustainability and growth of tourism destinations (Hoarau-Heemstra et al., 2023).

From a scientific perspective, the sustainability of cruise tourism activities is strongly influenced by the governance capacity of destinations in managing tourist flows, distributing economic benefits, and controlling environmental impacts (UNWTO, 2018). Several studies have examined the relationship between governance and cruise tourism from different



perspectives. London and Lohmann (2014), in their study on stakeholder interrelationships, highlight the issue of power asymmetry between cruise lines and destination stakeholders, where cruise lines often occupy a dominant position, leading to reactive and unbalanced governance. Similarly, Hall (2011), in his work on governance typology, emphasizes that the lack of conceptual clarity in governance weakens tourism policy analysis. A well-defined governance typology is essential to enable systematic and consistent policy analysis and to facilitate cross-regional and temporal comparisons.

The rapid growth of cruise tourism and the inability of governance systems to respond to environmental and economic changes have also been identified as critical issues. Dawson et al. (2014), through a case study on Arctic expedition cruise ships, demonstrate that the absence of a single authority and sector-specific planning constitutes a major barrier to sustainability and safety. This finding underscores the importance of coordinated governance, as fragmented authority leads to uncoordinated and partial management efforts, increasing environmental and safety risks in vulnerable regions. Furthermore, Vega-Muñoz et al. (2021) show that there is no universal governance model for cruise tourism, and that governance effectiveness depends on context, actors, and patterns of cooperation. This highlights the need for flexible and adaptive governance approaches that can accommodate local social, economic, and institutional conditions.

Based on these arguments, governance emerges as a key factor in determining the sustainability of cruise tourism. It plays a central role in regulating power relations, coordinating stakeholders, and shaping decision-making processes at both global and local levels. The absence of balanced governance structures may weaken sustainability efforts, increase environmental and safety risks, and limit benefits for local communities. Therefore, sustainable governance requires a proactive, collaborative, and adaptive approach, supported by clear regulatory frameworks and balanced coordination mechanisms, to ensure that cruise tourism develops responsibly and equitably in the long term.

## **METHODS**

The method used in this study is a literature review by examining various relevant scientific sources related to cruise tourism and sustainable governance. This approach is employed to identify, analyze, and synthesize existing knowledge concerning the relationship between governance and sustainability within the context of cruise tourism. Through this method, the study draws on previous research findings, theoretical frameworks, and policy-oriented discussions to build a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The literature reviewed in this study includes academic journal articles, institutional reports, and relevant policy documents that discuss cruise tourism development, governance systems, and sustainability challenges. These sources are selected based on their relevance to key themes such as economic distribution, environmental impact, stakeholder involvement, and governance structures in tourism destinations. By integrating insights from various studies, this research aims to highlight recurring patterns, critical issues, and conceptual perspectives that explain the dynamics of cruise tourism sustainability.

Furthermore, this literature-based approach allows for the exploration of governance as a multidimensional concept, encompassing regulatory frameworks, stakeholder coordination, and decision-making processes across different levels. It also enables the study to connect empirical findings from previous research with broader theoretical discussions on sustainable tourism and destination governance (Nkhata & McCool, 2012; UNWTO, 2018). Through this synthesis process, the study seeks to provide a structured and critical understanding of how governance capacity influences the sustainability of cruise tourism activities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature study indicate that cruise tourism has developed as a strategic sector with significant contributions to international tourist arrivals, particularly in destinations such as Sabang. The data show that cruise tourism contributes a substantial proportion of total international tourist visits, reaching 72.15% of total arrivals in 2023, derived from only eight cruise ship visits (Disparkot Sabang, 2024; Port Report BPKS, 2024). This finding highlights the high economic potential of cruise tourism, especially in attracting high-spending international tourists.

However, these results also reveal a contrasting condition in terms of economic distribution. Despite the high number of tourist arrivals, the benefits received by local communities remain limited. Previous studies indicate that local communities only receive approximately 10% of total tourist expenditure during shore excursions, suggesting the presence of economic leakage and opportunity loss (Nanda et al., 2019). This imbalance supports the argument that cruise tourism does not automatically generate equitable economic benefits and may instead reinforce structural inequalities within destinations. These findings are consistent with Klein (2011) and Brida and Zapata (2010), who argue that the economic benefits of cruise tourism are often not proportional to its social and environmental costs.

From a governance perspective, the findings emphasize that the sustainability of cruise tourism is strongly influenced by the capacity of destination governance systems. Governance plays a crucial role in regulating tourist flows, distributing economic benefits, and controlling environmental impacts (UNWTO, 2018). Empirical studies further show that weak governance structures, limited stakeholder involvement, and imbalanced power relations between cruise lines and destinations contribute to unsustainable outcomes (London & Lohmann, 2014; Hall, 2011). In addition, the absence of a single authority and sector-specific planning has been identified as a major barrier to sustainability and safety, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas (Dawson et al., 2014).

The analysis also reveals that governance in cruise tourism is highly contextual and cannot be generalized into a single universal model. The effectiveness of governance systems depends on local conditions, institutional capacity, stakeholder relationships, and patterns of collaboration (Vega-Muñoz et al., 2021). This suggests that adaptive and flexible governance approaches are necessary to address the dynamic challenges of cruise tourism development. Furthermore, the integration of community participation, environmental management, communication, and innovation is essential, as these factors are positively associated with sustainable destination development (Hoarau-Heemstra et al., 2023).

The following table presents the characteristics of effective tourism governance alongside common barriers in implementing sustainable practices:

**Table 1. Characteristics of Effective Tourism Governance and Barriers to Sustainable Practice Implementation**

No	Characteristics of Effective Tourism Governance	Common Barriers in Implementing Sustainable Practices
1	Coordination and monitoring of activities	Preference for short-term financial benefits over long-term social and environmental concerns
2	Involvement of multiple sectors and stakeholders in collective action	Lack of planning processes
3	Public participation	Limited stakeholder engagement
4	Use of consensus-based approaches	Lack of shared understanding of sustainability goals
5	Shared strategies and vision	Weak integration and coordination among government institutions

6	Responsiveness to stakeholders	Lack of accountability
7	Effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability	Lack of capacity or political will to implement policies
8	Transparency	—
9	Law enforcement and justice	—

The table shows that effective governance is characterized by coordination, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability, while the implementation of sustainable practices is often hindered by structural and institutional challenges. These barriers indicate that sustainability in cruise tourism is not solely dependent on policy availability, but also on the capacity and commitment of stakeholders to implement such policies effectively. The comparison between governance characteristics and barriers highlights the gap between ideal governance conditions and practical realities in the field.

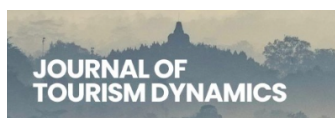
Overall, the findings demonstrate that governance is a key determinant of sustainability in cruise tourism. Without effective governance mechanisms, the rapid growth of cruise tourism may lead to increased environmental risks, unequal economic distribution, and limited benefits for local communities. Therefore, strengthening governance capacity through collaborative, adaptive, and well-coordinated approaches is essential to ensure that cruise tourism development aligns with sustainability principles.

## CONCLUSION

Diversity is one of the key principles of sustainable development (Baiquni, 2004). The absence of a universal governance model indicates that the sustainability of cruise tourism cannot be achieved through a uniform approach. Instead, its success depends on the ability of governance systems to adapt to local contexts and to build equitable collaboration among stakeholders. Adaptive and collaborative governance enables more responsive and integrated management of environmental, social, and economic impacts. In this context, the characteristics of effective governance proposed by Anastasopoulos et al. (2024) can serve as an important initial reference for guiding the transformation of cruise tourism management toward more sustainable practices, although their implementation must still be adjusted to the dynamics and capacities of each destination.

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